

A Disaster Averted

ANONYMOUS

Movement operations might not sound dangerous, and they're certainly not all that glamorous. As my unit's movement officer, I must confess I wasn't thrilled at the prospect of moving our equipment—all 1,500 pieces—from theater and being the last to arrive home. We were redeploying from Iraq after a year-long tour, and all of us were eager to see our loved ones.

Despite our "get-home-itis," we managed to clean all the equipment in record time with no injuries thanks to the great leadership and supervision of our NCOs. Everyone got on the plane and headed home except for about 15 troops who stayed behind to help load the ship.

We received the last of our equipment at the port the day before our ship arrived. The equipment was mostly ISU-90 containers, but there were a few broken vehicles that had been hauled to the staging area by privately contracted civilians. Everything was accounted for except a broken fuel truck, which finally arrived at 2300 that night. By that time, we'd been up for 18 hours and really wanted to get some sleep. Needless to say, we were ready to get the fuel truck unloaded and finish our day.

Since the fuel truck wasn't operational, the contractors had winched it onto a low-boy wrecker for the drive. Now we had to figure out how to get it off the low-boy. We didn't have a crane that could lift the vehicle, and it would've taken hours to get one. The contractor driver suggested elevating the low-boy's platform to roll the fuel truck off the back while another driver rode its brakes. I thought this sounded like a great idea. We even had a sergeant who was licensed and had a lot of experience driving fuel trucks.

Although I was tired, I still was concerned the truck's tires might slide off the low-boy's side as it rolled down the platform. The sergeant got into the truck and gave the thumbs-up for the contractor to lift the platform. Everything looked good as the truck slowly started to back off with its wheels straight, and my mind eased a little.

However, my worst fears were realized when the truck shot off the wrecker as soon as its rear tires hit the ramp. I remember thinking, "Wow! This guy really knows how to drive!" That thought quickly faded as the truck kept rolling right through a barbed-wire fence and crossed the street toward our stacked ISUs. Fortunately, the truck's rear tires hit a cement barricade just short of the ISUs, and the vehicle came to an abrupt stop. Disaster was averted another day.

If you've ever driven a HEMMT or fuel truck, you can probably figure out what went wrong with our plan. The driver didn't start the truck and allow the brake system to pressurize, so the truck just kept rolling even though he was slamming onto the brakes. Fortunately, the truck wasn't damaged and no one was hurt.

We were lucky—but we also were careless because we were very tired. I was the movement leader, and I allowed safety to take a back seat to mission accomplishment. Even with high operational tempo, we've got to slow down and put safety first.

-- Editors note: The author's name was withheld by request. If you would like to publish a story anonymously in Knowledge, please contact the editor by email at knowledge@crc.army.mil.